

Baptist Mission Work

In Porto Rico.

A. B. RUDD.

GENERAL MISSIONARY

March 1, 1912, to March 1, 1913.



O the big outside world it seems strange that this wee bit of land in the Southern Seas should have big problems, interests, needs. She is the *Little Sister of the Sea* to the larger land across the waters; but it is "The Little Sister" that oftentimes has the largest needs. To one who has lived and labored for 14 years on this "Isle of Eden" her problems, her interests, her needs, her salvation, have assumed large proportions. This is his apology for again presenting her claims to our millions of Baptists of the North.

Twice during the year Death has visited our ranks. In August, 1912 Francisco Jiménez, pastor of the Barros church, was taken; and in February of the present year, Alfonso Quiñones, pastor of the Gurabo church, followed. These brethren were young and vigorous, not over 30 years of age, married, and both fell victims to typhoid fever.

This is a heavy loss for the Mission. Two others have taken up the work laid down by these.

Misses Rice and Hill, our energetic workers in San Juan and vicinity, have also left the field, the first, because of ill health, and the other to continue her studies in college. Miss Cole who came to the island as a teacher in the Public Schools, entered the work in July and is heroically trying to carry the burden alone until another helper comes.

General View of the Situation

Evangelical work on the island is undoubtedly growing harder. Conditions are changing from year to year. A general census recently taken shows that the numerical gains during the last two years have been less than during previous two-year periods. In fact, in some denominations there have been slight losses. This is partly due to the fact that during this period the church rolls have been carefully revised, thus giving smaller, though more satisfactory membership.

Rev. C. S. Detweiler, Missionary of the Ponce District, says:

"It seems to be the consensus of opinion among Evangelical workers on the island that the Cause of Christ is meeting with stronger opposition than ever before. In the first place the Roman Catholic church is making extra efforts to regain lost ground. The Spiritualists are also carrying on an active propaganda and influencing many against the Gospel...."

The result of these conditions is that our membership is constantly being sifted by discipline. We have not made the gains that we would like to have made in order to offset losses by death and discipline and still provide for a steady advance. But our churches have gained in character... Our people are developing spiritually and understanding better what is expected of them as Christians."

Rev. G. A. Riggs, Missionary of the Coamo District, says:

"Considering my field as a whole I feel that the work is in a healthy condition.... An encouraging feature of the work is the increasing interest and activity of lay members. The chief discouraging feature in the town work is the bad influence of Americans, teachers and others, who are members of churches at home but come here and live a worldly life, and seldom if ever attend a religious service."

The following is from Rev. E. L. Humphrey, Missionary of the Caguas-Cayey District:

"The evangelical situation on this field has not changed to any marked degree. There seems to be, however, more thoughtfulness and seriousness on the part of the public in general.

We are constantly face to face with open doors... Our churches should be made to minister to

the whole life of the people—the physical, mental, moral, political and industrial life. This whole life must be permeated with religion, be made religious life....."

The conditions on the San Juan District, of which the writer is in charge, are very much as those described above. In the city of San Juan, perhaps the most difficult point on the island, the outlook is decidedly more favorable than formerly. Our Sunday School is growing in size and interest, while the attendance at the preaching services has also increased.

Rev. F. P. Freeman, who has been on the field a year and a half and will soon take charge of the San Juan District, says:

"To me it is wonderful that so much has been accomplished in so brief a period of time, especially in the country districts. In many points most difficult of access, in the mountains far from the nearest carriage road, the mountain people are organized into splendid churches and Sunday Schools, with good chapels, good congregations, and every evidence of the fact that the Gospel has meant more to them, and has done more for them in the way of inspiring them to live better lives morally, as well as to stimulate in them ambitions along the lines of industry and education, than any other force or institution."

Obstacles:

The following are some of the obstacles with which we have to contend, and to which special attention has been called by our more thoughtful native pastors:

1.—The attitude of favoritism on the part of the Insular Government toward the Roman Catholic church. This has been so marked of late that numbers of protests have been sent in from all parts of the Island.

2.—The consequent boldness of the Catholics in taking advantage of this unfortunate situation. Not long ago the Speaker of the House of Representatives recommended in a public address that the Catholic religion be made again the established religion of the Island.

3.—The unholy life and example of a large portion of the American residents of the Island. Our native Christians are awake to this most distressing situation and deplore its influence on Gospel work.

4.—The lack of workers of sufficient training and experience to cope with the situation and meet the growing demands of the work. Many men of good Christian character, though of meagre equipment, who rendered effective service during the early year of the work, can no longer be used to advantage because of the rapidly changing conditions. We must look to our Training School, hitherto very poorly equipped, to supply this need.

Notable Events and Tendencies of the Year.

1.—An excellent associational meeting.

By many it was thought to be the very best we have ever had.

2.—Our Bible institute, held January 22-29. This, too, reached high water mark, both in the class of work done as well as the spirit which marked all its sessions.

3.—The increased number of churches that are contributing to the support of their pastors. During the year about \$1,000 was given for this purpose and during the next we hope to increase this amount by \$400.

4.—The gradual elevation of the standard of Christian living. Pastors and churches are catching the idea. The obstacles above mentioned favor the development of character. Formerly it cost but little to be a Protestant; now it is different. Our gains may be smaller but they will be of a higher character both in the pupil and in the pew. Some unworthy men have been drawn in the past into our body of native workers, but when the testing time has come they have dropped out and given place to others of better stuff.

5.—The excellent work done by our lady missionaries, two of whom are in Ponce, two in Caguas and one in San Juan, together with a native Bible woman in each of the two latter points. This part of our force is greatly in need of reinforcement, which we hope to get during the present year.

Our Training School.

This is still without a "local habitation and a name", though not without life and great hope, as will be seen by the following from Rev. P. D. Woods, Principal:—

"Every year the educational standards of the island are being raised. This brings with it a corresponding demand. Our churches as they are appealing to the young people call for leaders who are capable of carrying the work to a successful issue. These leaders must be trained in heart and mind. During the past year there have come to us eleven young men who are preparing for these places of influence. While the number is not as large as it was last year, the standard of work is higher and all feel that eleven students doing first class work will bring better results than a larger number where the standard needs to be lowered.

....We are cheered by the prospect of having a school home and hope that this prospect may soon be changed into a reality. The possession of this home will give our school work a permanence which it has lacked in the past....."

It is gratifying to be able to state that the money necessary for the erection of our School building in Rio Piedras has been secured. It is proposed to have the building ready for use by April 1st, 1914.

In conclusion two things need to be said:—

1. The romantic period of mission work in Porto Rico has passed. We have now reached the period of steady, solid growth. Every inch gained from now on will mean earnest efforts and positive advance.

2. To meet the pressing demands we need better equipment. Our united cry is still for buildings. Shall we have them? An infant class of more than one hundred is quartered in a tent on the Ponce church lot for lack of room in the church. \$20,000 could most profitably be spent this year for chapels. Will the Baptists of the North give us half that amount?

With proper equipment, with the consecrated effort the missionaries, American and Porto Rican, are pledged to put forth and with the blessing of God, we will endeavor to make the next year the best yet for the salvation of Porto Rico.

Statistics.

American male workers, 6; lady missionaries, 5; native Bible women 2; native pastors, 32; new churches, organized, 4; Present number of churches, 50; Number of baptisms, 201; total membership, 2236; number of Sunday Schools, 53; number of pupils and teachers in the Sunday Schools, 3927; number of church houses, 31; contributions from the churches, \$3793.05; Total value of Mission property, \$112,100.

